

Rabbi's Message December 2022

Dear Friends,

This coming Sunday, our Community *B'yachad* participants will put their finishing touches on the *tallitot* they've been creating. It's been a magnificent project in so many ways, including in the questions and curiosities stirred. If the mitzvah (commandment) is simply to don a *tallit* during certain prayer services or when standing on the *bimah* as a prayer leader, why spend so much time and effort to create personalized prayer shawls? We have perfectly good ones hanging in the lobby, kosher and available to anyone who wants to use them. If beauty is only skin deep, of what real value is a thin layer of cotton, or satin or silk intricately crafted, colored and embroidered by the hands of imagination?

For that matter, what difference does it make if our Kiddush cup is a beautifully fashioned masterpiece of sterling silver, or a rinsed out can of Campbells soup? Why do we throw on nicer clothes for temple? Why do we cover the *challot* for *Shabbat* with beautiful cloth? If our work is to fulfill the commandments, are we turning *mitzvot* into a series of vanity projects?

Not for a minute.

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Rabbi's Message (continued)

Exodus 15:2 reads:

אֵל ה' אֱ בִי וְאֶרְמֵ מְנַהֵ: זֶה אֵ לִי וְאֵן וְהוֹ עָזִי וְזִמְרַת יְהוָה הִי לִי לְיִשׁוּעָה

The Lord is my strength and might;

God is my deliverance. This is my God whom I will glorify; The God of my forbearers' [house], I will exalt God.

What exactly does *glorifying God* look like? Is it even *possible* to add further glory to what already is the very definition of glory itself?

Asking the same questions in the 1st and 2nd centuries C.E., Rabbi Ishmael poses that when Exodus 15:2 says "This is my God whom I will glorify," what it really means is, "This is my God whom I will glorify **in the way I perform mitzvot. I shall prepare before God a beautiful lulav, beautiful sukkah, beautiful fringes (tzitzit), and beautiful phylacteries (Tefillin).**" In other words, the bare minimum just won't cut it. The way we champion God's greatness is to throw our entire selves into the effort. Just as partners beautify themselves in order to show honor and glory to the one with whom they share a chuppah, so too should we Jews beautify our efforts in order to show honor and glory to the God to whom we are so fully committed.

We refer to this practice as הִדּוּר מִצְוָה (*Hiddur Mitzvah*), "beautifying the mitzvah." It's why our sanctuary windows are made of such extraordinary stained glass. It's why our Torahs jingle with the melodious ring of silver bells as they parade around the sanctuary. It's why we adorn the *bimah* with beautiful flowers. Does God really expect us to accessorize? I doubt it. God sees the truth of our hearts, whatever its fashion. So no, I really don't believe God needs it. But we do. We need to take those extra steps, because in doing so, we prepare ourselves to appreciate the magnificence of God through the commandments we follow.

One of the Shabbat services I most treasure is on Chanukah, when families bring their favorite Menorahs so we can light the festival lights together. So that the lights shine brightly and, of course, beautifully.

The beauty matters. Whether your tallit or your channukiah, our creativity is an expression of our love for community and how we glorify our God. I hope you will join us with your *chanukiah* on December 23, as we come together as a community to increase the light with immense beauty.

L'Shalom,

Rabbi Dubin